

# Zhuangzi

(Chuang-tzu, Kwang-dze)  
(excerpts)

Translated by James Legge  
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## Taoism

Zhuangzi is thought to have been a Chinese Taoist that lived circa 350 BC. He is also a character in the works attributed to him. The works are among the

most influential Taoist writings besides the Tao Te Ching. Taoism is a philosophy and religion focused on finding the “way”. The Tao or “way” is the natural way of the universe; it also exists within. Taoists believe we may find the true way of the universe by knowing ourselves. According to the Taoists, one can find the Tao only by acting without acting (wu wei) and knowing without knowing (P’u). In the following excerpt, the Tao is referred to as “The Store of Light”. Zhuangzi appears to say that although we should follow the Tao, we are inherently incapable of knowing very much about its true nature. He says that the deeper we go in trying to explain it, the more deceived we become. He seems to suggest that in fact, all our thoughts and perceptions about the world are illusions or are equivalent to illusions. This view of Taoism appears to be very close to Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism. The following excerpt is from Legge’s Sacred Books of the East, Volume 39, Part I. For more, see: [www.sacred-texts.com/tao/index.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/index.htm).

### Book II: The Adjustment of Controversies

7. The Tào at first met with no responsive recognition. Speech at first had no constant forms of expression. Because of this there came the demarcations (of different views). Let me describe those demarcations:--they are the Left and the Right; the Relations and their Obligations; Classifications and their Distinctions; Emulations and Contentions. These are what are called 'the Eight Qualities.' Outside the limits of the world of men, the sage occupies his thoughts, but does not discuss about anything; inside those limits he occupies his thoughts, but does not pass any judgments. In the Khun Khiû, which embraces the history of the former kings, the sage indicates his judgments, but does not argue (in vindication of them). Thus it is that he separates his characters from one another without appearing to do so, and argues without the form of argument. How does he do so? The sage cherishes his views in his own breast, while men generally state theirs argumentatively, to show them to others. Hence we have the saying, 'Disputation is a proof of not seeing clearly.'

The Great Tào does not admit of being praised. The Great Argument does not require words. Great Benevolence is not (officially) benevolent. Great Disinterestedness does not vaunt its humility. Great Courage is not seen in stubborn bravery.



**Three Laughing Men by the Tiger Stream**

Song Dynasty, depicting that Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are one

The Tào that is displayed is not the Tào. Words that are argumentative do not reach the point. Benevolence that is constantly exercised does not accomplish its object. Disinterestedness that vaunts its purity is not genuine. Courage that is most stubborn is ineffectual. These five seem to be round (and complete), but they tend to become square (and immovable). Therefore the knowledge that stops at what it does not know is the greatest. Who knows the argument that needs no words, and the Way that is not to be trodden?

He who is able to know this has what is called 'The Heavenly Treasure-house.' He may pour into it without its being filled; he may pour from it without its being exhausted; and all the while he does not know whence (the supply) comes. This is what is called 'The Store of Light.'

Therefore of old Yâo asked Shun, saying, 'I wish to smite (the rulers of) Zung, Kwei, and Hsü-âo. Even when standing in my court, I cannot get them out of my mind. How is it so?' Shun replied, 'Those three rulers live (in their little states) as if they were among the mugwort and other brushwood;--how is it that you cannot get them out of your mind? Formerly, ten suns came out together, and all things were illuminated by them;--how much should (your) virtue exceed (all) suns!'

8. Nieh Khüeh asked Wang Î, saying, 'Do you know, Sir, what all creatures agree in approving and affirming?' 'How should I know it?' was the reply. 'Do you know what it is that you do not know?' asked the other again, and he got the same reply. He asked a third time,--'Then are all creatures thus without knowledge?' and Wang Î answered as before, (adding however), 'Notwithstanding, I will try and explain my meaning. How do you know that when I say "I know it," I really (am showing that) I do not know it, and that when I say "I do not know it," I really am showing that I do know it.' And let me ask you some questions:--'If a man sleep in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins, and half his body will be as if it were dead; but will it be so with an eel? If he be living in a tree, he will be frightened and all in a tremble; but will it be so with a monkey? And does any one of the three know his right place? Men eat animals that have been fed on grain and grass; deer feed on the thickset grass; centipedes enjoy small snakes; owls and crows delight in mice; but does any one of the four know the right taste? The dog-headed monkey finds its mate in the female gibbon; the elk and the axis deer cohabit; and the eel enjoys itself with other fishes. Mâu Zhiang and Lî Kî were accounted by men to be most beautiful, but when fishes saw them, they dived deep in the water from them; when birds, they flew from them aloft; and when deer saw them, they separated and fled away. But did any of these four know which in the world is the right female attraction? As I look at the matter, the first principles of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of approval and disapproval are inextricably mixed and confused together:--how is it possible that I should know how to discriminate among them?'

Nieh Khüeh said (further), 'Since you, Sir, do not know what is advantageous and what is hurtful, is the Perfect man also in the same way without the knowledge of them?' Wang i replied, 'The Perfect man is spirit-like. Great lakes might be boiling about him, and he would not feel their heat; the Ho and the Han might be frozen up, and he would not feel the cold; the hurrying thunderbolts might split the mountains, and the wind shake the ocean, without being able to make him afraid. Being such, he mounts on the clouds of the air, rides on the sun and moon, and rambles at ease beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!'

9. Khü Zhiào-dze asked Khang-wû Dze, saying, 'I heard the Master (speaking of such language as the following):--"The sagely man does not occupy himself with worldly affairs. He does not put himself in the way of what is profitable, nor try to avoid what is hurtful; he has no pleasure in seeking (for anything from any one); he does not care to be found in (any established) Way; he speaks without speaking; he does not speak when he speaks; thus finding his enjoyment outside the dust and dirt (of the world)." The Master considered all this to be a shoreless flow of mere words, and I consider it to describe the course of the Mysterious Way.--What do you, Sir, think of it?' Khang-wû dze replied, 'The hearing of such words would have perplexed even Hwang-Tî, and how should Khiû be competent to understand them? And you, moreover, are too hasty in forming your estimate (of their meaning). You see the egg, and (immediately) look out for the cock (that is to be hatched from it); you see the bow, and (immediately) look out for the dove (that is to be brought down by it) being roasted. I will try to explain the thing to you in a rough way; do you in the same way listen to me.

'How could any one stand by the side of the sun and moon, and hold under his arm all space and all time? (Such language only means that the sagely man) keeps his mouth shut, and puts aside questions that are uncertain and dark; making his inferior capacities unite with him in honouring (the One Lord). Men in general bustle about and toil; the sagely man seems stupid and to know nothing. He blends ten thousand years together in the one (conception of time); the myriad things all pursue their spontaneous course, and they are all before him as doing so.

'How do I know that the love of life is not a delusion? and that the dislike of death is not like a young person's losing his way, and not knowing that he is (really) going home? Lî Kî was a daughter of the border Warden of Ai. When (the ruler of) the state of Zin first got possession of her, she wept till the tears wetted all the front of her dress. But when she came to the place of the king, shared with him his luxurious couch, and ate his grain-and-grass-fed meat, then she regretted that she had wept. How do I know that the dead do not repent of their former craving for life?

'Those who dream of (the pleasures of) drinking may in the morning wail and weep; those who dream of wailing and weeping may in the morning be going out to hunt. When they were dreaming they did not know it was a dream; in their dream they may even have tried to interpret it; but when they awoke they knew that it was a dream. And there is the great awaking, after which we shall know that this life was a great dream. All the while, the stupid think they are awake, and with nice discrimination insist on their knowledge; now playing the part of rulers, and now of grooms. Bigoted was that Khiû! He and you are both dreaming. I who say that you are dreaming am dreaming myself. These words seem very strange; but if after ten thousand ages we once meet with a great sage who knows how to explain them, it will be as if we met him (unexpectedly) some morning or evening.

10. 'Since you made me enter into this discussion with you, if you have got the better of me and not I of you, are you indeed right, and I indeed wrong? If I have got the better of you and not you of me, am I indeed right and you indeed wrong? Is the one of us right and the other wrong? are we both right or both wrong? Since we cannot come to a mutual and common understanding, men will certainly continue in darkness on the subject.

'Whom shall I employ to adjudicate in the matter? If I employ one who agrees with you, how can he, agreeing with you, do so correctly? And the same may be said, if I employ one who agrees with me. It will be the same if I employ one who differs from us both or one who agrees with us both. In this way I and you and those others would all not be able to come to a mutual understanding; and shall we then wait for that (great sage)? (We need not do so.) To wait on others to learn how conflicting opinions are changed is simply like not so waiting at all. The harmonising of them is to be found in the invisible operation of Heaven, and by following this on into the unlimited past. It is by this method that we can complete our years (without our minds being disturbed).

'What is meant by harmonising (conflicting opinions) in the invisible operation of Heaven? There is the affirmation and the denial of it; and there is the assertion of an opinion and the rejection of it. If the affirmation be according to the reality of the fact, it is certainly different from the denial of it:--there can be no dispute about that. If the assertion of an opinion be correct, it is certainly different from its rejection:--neither can there be any dispute about that. Let us forget the lapse of time; let us forget the conflict of opinions. Let us make our appeal to the Infinite, and take up our position there.'

11. The Penumbra asked the Shadow, saying, 'Formerly you were walking on, and now you have stopped; formerly you were sitting, and now you have risen up:--how is it that you are so without stability?' The Shadow replied, 'I wait for the movements of something else to do what I do, and that something else on which I wait waits further on another to do as it does. My waiting,--is it for the scales of a snake, or the wings of a cicada? How should I know why I do one thing, or do not do another?'

'Formerly, I, Kwang Kâu, dreamt that I was a butterfly, a butterfly flying about, feeling that it was enjoying itself I did not know that it was Kâu. Suddenly I awoke, and was myself again, the veritable Kâu. I did not know whether it had formerly been Kâu dreaming that he was a butterfly, or it was now a butterfly dreaming that it was Kâu. But between Kâu and a butterfly there must be a difference. This is a case of what is called the Transformation of Things.'